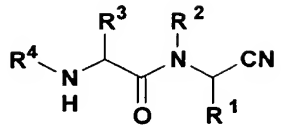
WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A compound of the formula I:



I

wherein:

R^1 is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen (H), C_1-C_6 alkyl, C_1-C_6 alkenyl, C_1-C_6 alkynyl, C_3-C_8 cycloalkyl and C_3-C_8 cycloalkenyl;

R^2 is a substituted or unsubstituted functional group selected from the group consisting of C_1-C_6 alkyl, C_3-C_8 cycloalkyl, C_3-C_8 cycloalkenyl, alkenyl, alkynyl, aryl, arylalkyl, arylalkenyl and arylalkynyl;

R^3 is selected from the group consisting of alkyl, alkenyl, alkynyl, cycloalkyl, cycloalkylalkyl, alkylthioalkyl, arylalkylthioalkyl, cycloalkenyl, aryl, arylalkyl, arylalkenyl, arylalkynyl, heteroaryl, heteroarylalkyl, cycloheteroalkyl and cycloheteroalkylalkyl, wherein any R^3 group may optionally be substituted through any available carbon atom with 1 to 5 substituents selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, halo, alkyl, polyhaloalkyl, alkoxy, haloalkoxy, alkoxycarbonyl, alkenyl, alkynyl, cycloalkyl, cycloalkylalkyl, heteroarylamino, -N(R^5)Ar, cycloheteroalkyl, cycloheteroalkylalkyl, OR^5, hydroxyalkyl, nitro, cyano, $NR^5R^{5'}$, alkylamino, thiol, alkylthio, alkylcarbonyl, acyl, alkoxycarbonyl, aminocarbonyl, alkynylaminocarbonyl, alkylaminocarbonyl, alkenylaminocarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, alkylcarbonylamino, arylcarbonylamino, alkylsulfonylamino, alkylaminocarbonylamino, alkoxycarbonylamino, alkylsulfonyl, aminosulfonyl, alkylsulfinyl, sulfonamido and sulfonyl;

R^4 is hydrogen(H), or R^4 can be taken together with R^3 to form a substituted or unsubstituted 4 to 5 membered heterocyclic ring, preferably substituted by $NR^5R^{5'}$ or C_1-C_6 alkyl; and

R^5 and $R^{5'}$ for each occurrence are each independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, alkyl, alkenyl, alkynyl, cycloalkyl, aryl, arylalkyl, arylalkenyl, arylalkynyl, heterocycle and heteroaryl.

including all prodrug esters, pharmaceutically acceptable salts and stereoisomers thereof.

2. The compound as defined in Claim 1 wherein

R^1 is H or C_1-C_6 alkyl;

R^2 is C_1-C_6 alkyl;

R^3 is alkyl or cycloalkyl; and

R^4 is H.

3. The compound as defined in Claim 1 wherein

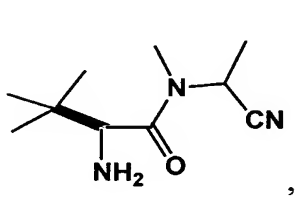
R^1 is H;

R^2 is C_1-C_6 alkyl;

R^3 is a cycloalkyl containing 6 to 15 carbons; and

R^4 is H.

4. The compound as defined in Claim 1 having the structure:



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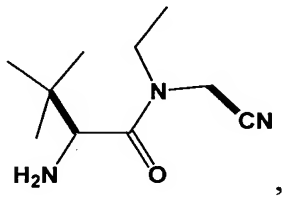

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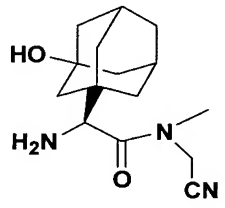

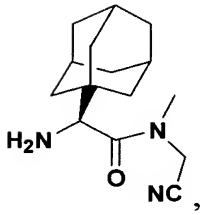

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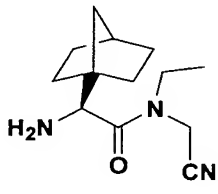

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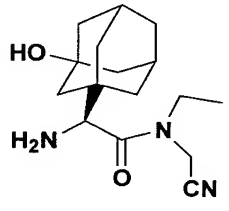

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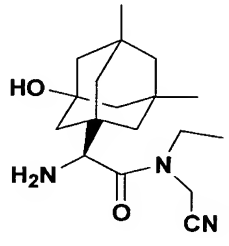

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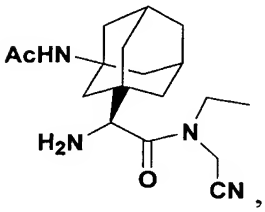

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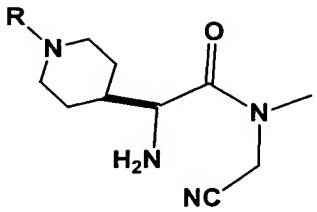

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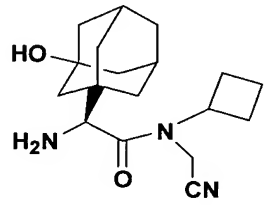

including all pharmaceutically acceptable salts and stereoisomers thereof.

5. The compounds as defined in Claim 3 wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable salt is the hydrochloride salt or the trifluoroacetic acid salt.

6. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound as defined in Claim 1 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier therefor.

7. A pharmaceutical combination comprising a compound as defined in Claim 1 and at least one therapeutic agent selected from the group consisting of an antidiabetic agent, an anti-obesity agent, a anti-hypertensive agent, an anti-atherosclerotic agent and a lipid-lowering agent.

8. The pharmaceutical combination as defined in Claim 7 comprising the compound as defined in Claim 1 and an antidiabetic agent.

9. The combination as defined in Claim 8 wherein the antidiabetic agent is at least one agent selected from the group consisting of a biguanide, a sulfonyl urea, a glucosidase inhibitor, a PPAR γ agonist, a PPAR α/γ dual agonist, an aP2 inhibitor, a SGLT2 inhibitor, an insulin sensitizer, a glucagon-like peptide-l (GLP-l), insulin and a meglitinide.

10. The combination as defined in Claim 9 wherein the antidiabetic agent is at least one agent selected from the group consisting of metformin, glyburide, glimepiride, glipyride, glipizide, chlorpropamide, gliclazide, acarbose, miglitol, pioglitazone, troglitazone, rosiglitazone, insulin, Gl-262570, isaglitazone, JTT-501, NN-2344, L895645, YM-440, R-119702, AJ9677, repaglinide, nateglinide, KAD1129, AR-HO39242, GW-409544, KRP297, AC2993, LY315902, and NVP-DPP-728A.

11. The combination as defined in Claim 8 wherein the compound is present in a weight ratio to the antidiabetic agent in the range of about 0.0l to about 300:l.

12. The combination as defined in Claim 7 wherein the anti-obesity agent is at least one agent selected from the group consisting of a beta 3 adrenergic agonist, a lipase inhibitor, a serotonin (and dopamine) reuptake inhibitor, a thyroid receptor beta compound, and an anorectic agent.

13. The combination as defined in Claim 12 wherein the anti-obesity agent is at least one agent selected from the group consisting of orlistat, ATL-962, AJ9677, L750355, CP331648, sibutramine, topiramate, axokine, dexamphetamine, phentermine, phenylpropanolamine and mazindol.

14. The combination as defined in Claim 7 wherein the lipid lowering agent is at least one agent selected from the group consisting of an MTP inhibitor, cholesterol ester transfer protein, an HMG CoA reductase inhibitor, a squalene synthetase inhibitor, a fibric acid derivative, an upregulator of LDL receptor activity, a lipoxygenase inhibitor, or an ACAT inhibitor.

15. The combination as defined in Claim 14 wherein the lipid lowering agent is at least one agent selected from the group consisting of pravastatin, lovastatin, simvastatin, atorvastatin, cerivastatin, fluvastatin, nisvastatin, visastatin, fenofibrate, gemfibrozil, clofibrate, avasimibe, TS-962, MD-700, CP-529414, and/or LY295427.

16. The combination as defined in Claim 14 wherein the compound as defined in Claim 1 is present in a weight ratio to the lipid-lowering agent in the range of about 0.01 to about 100:1.

17. A method for treating or delaying the progression or onset of diabetes, diabetic retinopathy, diabetic neuropathy, diabetic nephropathy, wound healing, insulin resistance, hyperglycemia, hyperinsulinemia, Syndrome X, diabetic complications, elevated blood levels of free fatty acids or glycerol, hyperlipidemia, obesity, hypertriglyceridemia, atherosclerosis or hypertension, which comprises administering to a mammalian species in need of treatment a therapeutically effective amount of a compound as defined in Claim 1.

18. A method according to claim 17 further comprising administering, concurrently or sequentially, a therapeutically effective amount of at least one additional therapeutic agent selected from the group consisting of an antidiabetic agent, an anti-obesity agent, a anti-hypertensive agent, an anti-atherosclerotic agent and a lipid-lowering agent.